



Aloha from

Ask this former Toastmaster what motivated her to seek the highest office in the state of Hawaii, and her answer will focus on people: Helping people. Caring for people. Respecting people. She explains, "I always wanted

to help people...and really try to make their lives better." She views her election as an "opportunity to bring a lot of good people into the government, people who could make a good contribution." In the first six months of her four-year term as governor, she has done just that, selecting people based on their abilities – whether or not they have ever served in government before.

Born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1953, Linda Lingle moved to Hawaii shortly after graduating *cum laude* from California State University, Northridge in 1975. After working in journalism for several years, she began her political career, first serving 10 years on the Maui County Council, then eight years as mayor of Maui. After narrowly failing on her first attempt to win the governor's position in 1998, Linda Lingle was elected to the seat in November 2002.

Prior to her election, *Hawaii Business* magazine chose Linda Lingle as one of the 10 most influential people in the state of Hawaii. In its January 2003 issue, *Honolulu* magazine named her

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– GOV. LINDA LINGLE

Hawaii

**An interview
with Hawaii
Governor
and former
Toastmaster
Linda Lingle**



BY JOANN M. McCABE, ATM-B

Islander of the Year, because she was “the one person who had the most impact on Island life in the past 12 months.”

Lingle credits Toastmasters for helping her develop her clear and informal communication style – a skill of invaluable importance in the bright spotlight of politics. She joined Toastmasters in the early 1980s, when serving as a member of the Maui County Council. “Toastmasters gave me a chance every week to speak in front of people who were very supportive and were going to help me be a better speaker,” she says. “I went through the CTM level of Toastmasters and then I just went out and practiced the things that I had learned.”

Widely regarded as an articulate and thoughtful speaker, Lingle is always poised and prepared, equally at home in televised live appearances and debates as she is in meetings with President George W. Bush, talking to school children or promoting Hawaii as a travel destination. Hawaii District 49 Public Relations Officer Ron Neff knows firsthand Lingle’s ability to adjust to different audiences. He says, “Since I served on her campaign and am also a Toastmaster, I am impressed with her communication skills. When she gets up to talk, she is very effective.”

Offering “A New Beginning”

Having won on a campaign promise of “a new beginning,” Governor Lingle, facing a lethargic economy and budget shortfalls, has her work cut out. In an effort to keep people informed, she invites the public to “talk story” – Hawaiian vernacular for informal conversations among friends – by tuning in to the locally televised *Talk Story with Your Administration* program hosted by Angela Perez Baraquio, Miss America 2001 from Hawaii.



HAWAII At A Glance

Resident population: 1,211,537 (2000)

Location: 2,390 miles from California
3,850 miles from Japan
4,900 miles from China

Six main islands:

- Kauai
- Molokai
- Lanai
- Maui
- Oahu (the city of Honolulu and Waikiki Beach are here)
- Hawaii (also known as the Big Island)

Major industries: Tourism, military, agriculture

Toastmasters: Aloha District 49
53 clubs, 975 members

Helpful web sites:

- www.gohawaii.com
- www.hawaii.gov/gov
- www.cochawaii.org
- www.district49.org

Familiar with the spotlight herself, the former Miss America finds Lingle to be an impressive speaker and personable individual. Baraquio says Lingle “can connect with a lot of people from diverse backgrounds and can bridge the gap between groups.”

On the premier *Talk Story* show last April, the governor and Baraquio discussed tough issues: expanding the economy, improving public education and restoring trust in government. These issues, common to much of the nation and the world, are the focus of Lingle’s administration.

The need to expand and diversify the economy is not lost on Jim Tollefson, president and CEO of the Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii. He has seen Lingle communicate at various levels to different groups, from business people to military officers to medical professionals. He says that not only is she a great speaker, but audiences “are impressed with her desire to do the right thing. When she speaks, it is coming from the heart. She really wants to do the right thing for Hawaii, for all the people of Hawaii.”

Meeting the Challenge

Communication skills merge with leadership skills as Lingle travels the world representing Hawaii. Imagine the variety of expertise needed on her recent trip to Washington, D.C. and New York City. Besides meeting one-on-one with President Bush, she testified before Congress, discussed Hawaii’s bond ratings with the major rating agencies, discussed city operations with New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, spoke with the president of the New York Stock Exchange and met with former NYC Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. And perhaps you saw her on national television, appearing live on CNN’s *Inside Politics*, *Fox News* and *The O’Reilly Factor*.

Closer to home, Lingle spent the morning of May 1 this year on the beach in Waikiki promoting “May Day is lei day in Hawaii” via several national television networks. With the blue Pacific Ocean in the background and sunny skies overhead, she finds there are many different ways to promote tourism in Hawaii.

Speaking Tips

Can she offer any tips to Toastmasters? She offers not one, but two: First, about basic speech structure: “Having a well-structured opening, body and closing is probably the most important, most elementary lesson.”

Second, she emphasizes that speakers must “respect their audiences. To communicate with all kinds of people, [you must] recognize that you don’t speak to a group of 10 the way you do to a group of a hundred or a group of a thousand.”

Whatever the group is, each is different, the governor notes, “and I adjust my word choice, my speaking style, my tone, everything, including what I wear, depending upon who my audience is. I was with a group of students this morning, second- and third-graders. My voice is a lot more animated with them than it might be with an adult group. So you approach each audience differently.”

The formality often surrounding her office can intimidate people, but Gov. Lingle is adept at putting audiences at ease. She does it by making a connection with them. She says, “Somehow I find that making light of yourself – it doesn’t have to be a formal joke – with me (at 5’9”), it’s my height – will let people see you in a less formal way, so now they’re relaxed, and it’s easier for you to talk with them. They’re open to what you’re going to say.”

When she became mayor of Maui County – an area that includes the three islands of Molokai, Lanai and Maui and has some of the best white sand beaches in the world – Linda Lingle helped start a Toastmasters club at the county government, because “when you’re in government, your job is to communicate – communicate with the public, communicate with the legislators or with other cabinet members.

“I tell people that Toastmasters is the least expensive personal improvement class you can go to, because it does build confidence. Anybody who begins and sticks with it any length of time ends up a better speaker, so they gain confidence. [As a result] I think they’re able to do their job better.”

Another benefit of Toastmasters training, Lingle notes, is that “You meet highly motivated people. Everyone in Toastmasters is there because they want to improve themselves, and those are the kind of people to be around.”

Advice for a new or struggling Toastmaster? “Just stick with it,” Lingle says. “You’re going to get better every single week. I don’t remember anyone who didn’t get better every single week, at least a little.”

She adds, “Go right through that workbook. If you are able to get through those first 10 lessons of Toastmasters, then it’s simply a matter of practice. Toastmasters gives you that chance.”

A Role Model to Many

When Linda Lingle won the gubernatorial election in 2002, she became the first on several fronts: the first Jewish, the first female, the first member of the Republican party in 40 years, and the first (county) mayor to become governor.

Lingle says she feels a “real responsibility to women and girls because I know that however I’m judged, whatever my performance is, over my hopefully two terms here, is how people will judge candidates to come. If people think I did a good job, that will help the next person have a chance.” Lingle says parents and young girls “tell me all the time how excited they are because all that the girls who are now 6- or 7-years-old know is [that Hawaii has] a woman governor. That’s their frame of reference.”

To illustrate, Lingle tells a story of when she was mayor on Maui. After she spoke to a classroom of 7- and 8-year olds, one little boy raised his hand and asked, “Do you have to be a lady to be the mayor?”

With her background in journalism, Lingle is also the first non-lawyer governor in nearly 30 years. She likens public speaking to journalism in that both are a matter of “taking in information and getting to the essence of it. Speaking is another version of doing what a journalist does. It is getting to the essence but then communicating it back, not on the written page, but verbally. It’s a variation of using the same skills, so having experience in both has helped me to communicate with all kinds of people.”

The Aloha Spirit

Lingle appreciates the international aspect of Toastmasters. “One of the neat things about Toastmasters is that you can go anywhere in the world and you still have your 10 lessons, and you have Table Topics and an immediate bond with everybody who is a Toastmaster, wherever they live. When people hear I was a Toastmaster, wherever I go, they want to talk to me about it, and I can relate to exactly what they’re talking about. That’s a really nice

aspect of having an international organization that has a defined program because then, wherever you go, you can relate to people.”

Hawaii is known around the world as “the islands of aloha.” Lingle describes the aloha spirit: “It’s about caring for people who you don’t even know, treating people in a respectful way. It’s about making people feel welcome even when you don’t know them.”

In caring for the people of Hawaii, Linda Lingle knows that she must take care of her own health, so despite her busy schedule, she often manages to fit in an early morning swim. She also appears in a public service announcement about the importance of breast cancer awareness, emphasizing early detection and prevention.

Of her Toastmasters training, Lingle says she is “especially thankful when I try to help others become effective speakers.” For example, at the state Republican convention for the last few years, Lingle taught a public speaking workshop, training new political candidates for office.

She continues to promote Toastmasters whenever possible and declared March 2003 as Toastmasters International Month for the State of Hawaii. The proclamation reads, in part, “Speaking with clarity is a powerful and important skill that can help to overcome any obstacle to effective performance in virtually every endeavor and line of work.”

A Final Tip: Know When to Stop

Lingle says one of the best things in Toastmasters is that you don’t talk for a long time. “Many speakers don’t know how to stop because they don’t have their talk clearly thought out. So I would say, know how you’re going to close so you don’t go on and test the patience of the audience.”

Respecting people, caring for people, and helping people are all part of the job for Hawaii Gov. Linda Lingle. **T**

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